How To Change A Habit

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Basically Put...

This book is copyrighted, so don't distribute it without prior expressed permission from the author. Unauthorized distributions hurt myself and my capacity to make more guides such as this.

Second, I provide advice in this book, but use your head! Don't do anything dangerous and I'm not responsible for any self-inflicted damage.

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Introduction

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit."
-**Aristotle**

Do you have a habit you want to change? Maybe you want to quit smoking, stop eating unhealthy foods or turn around negative thoughts. Do you have a habit you want to create? Maybe you want to exercise more, stick to a new diet, work more productively, become friendlier or just enjoy life more.

Whether you want to remove a bad habit or create a good one, this e-book will give you the means to achieving it. To most people changing a habit is a tremendous struggle. Spending years building up to a change and going through repeated failures before something sticks seems fairly common. I'm here to say that changing habits is nothing more than a skill, like riding a bicycle, and with the right information and training it is a skill anyone can develop.

I created this e-book, not to be read in one sitting and then forgotten, but to serve as a handbook for making changes. Many of the concepts I'll talk about in this book are unnecessary for someone who is just beginning to make changes. Triggers, operant conditioning and stability points are useful to understand but aren't necessary to start making the changes you want.

While reading this book, I'll start by giving you the information you need to start changing habits right away. So if you've been struggling with a goal, whether it is losing weight, keeping a budget or improving your self talk, I'll start by giving you the basic tools you need to make the change.

From that point I'll discuss more advanced techniques for changing habits. These tools will work when basic methods fail. These advanced techniques will also allow you to look at your habits in a new light. Instead of seeing obvious needs for improvement, you can start to experiment with new ways of living and thinking.

Remember first that habit changing is a skill. You probably couldn't play the piano without any practice or instruction. Similarly, don't make unreasonable expectations for your ability to change habits without having any practice or instruction. Instead try to use this book as a guide to give you more options and a better understanding.

If you've struggled with changing behaviors before, don't be so quick to blame your willpower or motivation. Without an understanding of how habits actually work, most of the time a habit fails will be due to a poor strategy rather than a lack of willpower. Discipline is necessary, but for every drop of discipline a gallon of strategy and understanding goes into creating a change in habits. Not having enough discipline is almost never the biggest limit to your success.

My Story

Who am I and why should you be listening to my advice? I don't have a doctorate and I haven't served as a personal coach to the worlds elite. Nor is my story a captivating tale of overcoming oppression, addiction or laziness. My story is a rather common one and my knowledge of changing habits have come from a good dose of research and a lot of personal experimentation.

It began several years ago when I was guided by my routine. Most of my attempts to change behavior fell flat. I would try to exercise more and end up staying home to watch television. I would try to read more and not pick up a book in weeks. I wasn't hanging over a cliff, but I certainly wasn't reaching the bridge to success anytime soon. In short, I was like most people, governed by habits I didn't really know I had and limited in my capacity to change.

It was around this time that I started stumbling across information for how to change behavior. Not just guides on how to break a single habit, like eating better or following a budget, but a different philosophy on changing habits themselves.

Instead of changing your behavior, as a tremendous struggle that should only be used in the most painful situations, this philosophy treated habit change like some people treat interior design. Rather than a painful struggle, you could change behaviors like you change fashions in your room, changing on a whim just to see what it would feel like.

After discovering this philosophy, I started changing my habits. Becoming a vegetarian, giving up television, waking up early, exercising daily, cutting out junk food, reducing internet usage, reading more and changing my patterns of thinking are only a few of the habits I've altered over the past few years. Although I discontinued some of them, those decisions were conscious choices, not breaks in willpower.

Today I feel comfortable in my ability to change almost any behavior I have, either permanently or as a temporary experiment. I've built the skill of changing habits enough that instead of making it a chore it has become a joy. I love the idea of trying a new way of living, habit changes are now a personal challenge and an adventure.

Although I base most of my information from this e-book on personal experiments, I certainly have my own idiosyncracies. This means that I back up most of my ideas and insights from others sources. Along with experimentation

I've done a lot of research in this area, so many of these major concepts I've found to be backed up by psychological research and the experience of many world experts and therapists.

Will this work for you?

I can understand a little skepticism. If I had read these words several years ago, I probably would have thought the person writing them was a highly organized robot, having a natural sense of discipline and order that would make it impossible for me to follow.

I want to make it very clear, that my ability to change habits hasn't come from an innate sense of order, support from the people around me or a lot of willpower. Before I learned how to change habits I was comfortable living in a state of almost complete disorder and mess. Many of the habit changes I made were met with apathy to complete resistance from friends and family, so I didn't have a cheerleading team pushing me forward. Before I built this ability, I wasn't

disciplined. I always looked for ways to get out of doing work and the projects I did start, I rarely finished. Hopping between whims, I had trouble committing myself to work on the things that I was completely motivated by.

You don't need to create an obsession for changing habits to make this work for you. The basic concepts in this book are more than enough to change 90% of the behaviors you want to. You may become interested as you build up skill in this art, but you can use the ideas in this book to change one habit just as you can to change twenty.

What about fun and spontaneity?

Changing habits doesn't have to make you a robot that can never do anything outside its programming. You can have order and fun. Realize that you already have habits, you just aren't aware of them. How you go to work, what you eat and how you behave are already guided by a long list of habits. The ability to change your habits simply means that you are in the drivers seat. You get to decide what habits to install instead of letting your habits rule you.

Habit changes can often lead to more fun and spontaneity. When you free up the time, energy and money being sucked away by your ineffective habits, you suddenly have a lot more resources. After a few months of changing habits I noticed that I had several times the capacity to enjoy and work than I had before.

Habit changes can be used to eliminate and restrict, but they can also be used to enhance what you already have.

What is a Habit?

When I was a kid I used to walk to school. Living in the northern parts of Canada, we got a lot of snow. I can remember that after a big snowfall, many of the shortcuts kids took to school were filled in with a thick blanket of snow.

It would usually take one kid to struggle through the feet of snow. If you happened to be this kid, moving through the snow was difficult. It usually took a bit longer and you tried to take big steps to avoid wading through the powder.

But after you carved out a few holes in the snow from your footprints, invariably the next kid would follow in the path you made and after him, dozens more would follow. The footprints you originally made would be widened and the snow underneath would become more compressed. After this kid, dozens more

children would continue the path, compacting the snow and turning a few holes into a solid path.

If you waited a few days after your initial wade through the snow, you would realize that it was now the only path being taken. If snow continued to fall, the path would become a hard compact surface surrounded by a few feet of snowy walls. From the initial carving in the snow, the path would become the only viable route. What was once a few footprints becomes the only road.

Creating habits is much like the process I used to carve a path through the snow as a kid. It requires a short-term burst of energy, to push through the snow, but afterwards it becomes easier. Given enough time, the path that was once difficult to walk becomes the default mode of transportation. Give a habit enough time and it soon becomes more difficult not to follow.

Most of the techniques I'll discuss, with a few notable exceptions, are designed to handle the first phase. That first phase is the process of digging through the snow to carve out the initial path. This requires the most work and it is the stage that gives the most difficulty. Once you have carved out the initial path, it requires a lot less work to make the habit stick.

Trial Periods – The First Push

The first push, which makes up 99% of the total energy you will put into creating a permanent habit takes place in the first month. If done successfully, after the first month the new habit will be a reflex, requiring only a little bit of energy to handle changes in situations. Even if you eventually let the habit slip after several months, the real source of the problem usually occurred somewhere in the first month.

There is a story of two lumberjacks that illustrates this problem. Both lumberjacks are cutting down trees in a forest. But day after day, the first lumberjack cuts down almost double the amount of trees. One day, the underperforming lumberjack asks his friend how he manages to cut down as many trees, and wants to know what he can do to become as strong as his friend is.

The first lumberjack replies that he is no stronger than his friend, but each morning before cutting trees he spends an hour sharpening his axe blade. This, he says, is the secret to his success.

Habit changing is much like cutting down trees. When you see someone who succeeds in a change, it is easy to say that they have more willpower or strength than you do. But usually the difference is that the other person, often without realizing it, did some serious sharpening before he started.

The first thirty days are like the hour the axeman spent sharpening his blade before cutting trees. They may seem insignificant when you keep a habit for months or years, but they account for most of your results. Properly executed the first thirty days are the most important aspect to making a habit stick.

The Thirty Day Trial

As I mentioned in the introduction, I'll discuss techniques for changing behavior from the core basics, to the more advanced tricks. The Thirty Day Trial is perhaps one of the most fundamental elements of changing habits. Basically put a

Thirty Day Trial means that you will commit to following the guidelines of your habit for 30 consecutive days without exceptions.

Following a Thirty Day Trial alone is enough to solve 50-75% of problems with habits. The rest of this book is simply refining this core process.

Why Thirty Day Trials Work

Thirty Day Trials come from a fairly old idea of committing to a change for a specific amount of time. I have seen many suggestions from 7 days to several months. Thirty days isn't a magic number and it doesn't have any special properties. However, thirty days as a commitment does have several advantages over other time periods:

Less than three weeks is usually not enough time to make a habit completely automatic. Some advanced techniques can make a change almost permanent in less time, but I've found they are often difficult to use and don't work consistently.

More than two months requires too much of an initial commitment for all but the most necessary changes. It is easier to commit for the first thirty days which make up 95% of the work, rather than commit for ninety days or a year which account for only another 1-4% of the effort.

Thirty days is roughly a month which makes it easy to fit into a calendar system.

Although setting up a Thirty Day Trial isn't brain surgery, there are ways you can make it stick more effectively. I've found that discipline is almost never the limiting factor in making it the full Thirty Days. Instead the most common reasons you'll quit after a week or two are:

1. Loss of interest
2. Forgetfulness
3. Unclear guidelines
4. Unforseen obstacles

When I was early on in learning the skill of changing habits, I decided to start the habit of practicing speed-reading for fifteen minutes a day. Even though this is a fairly easy habit, I completely forgot about running it after about two weeks. I missed a day and had to start over.

Fortunately with a bit of common sense and planning you can avoid many mistakes like that. Now I ensure I place reminders for habits that don't immediately draw my focus so I won't forget.

Writing Your Plan and Commitment

The best way to avoid getting lost is to have a map. You can avoid most of your problems in making habit changes simply by writing down your plan and commitment before starting your Thirty Day Trial. Writing down your commitment and storing it somewhere only takes a few minutes, but the effort can double or triple your rate of success.

Writing out your plan and commitment does several things that simply thinking about your goal or casually mentioning to a friend won't:

1. Writing creates clarity.
2. Writing makes your commitment more memorable.
3. Writing motivates.

Writing Creates Clarity

Writing creates clarity by taking vague thoughts and desires, turning them into clear words and language. You may have a vague urge to exercise more, but what exactly does that entail? Does that mean exercising every single day? If so, for how long? What kind of exercise are you going to do? When are you going to do it? All these questions are rarely properly addressed when you are simply toying with the commitment in your head. Writing will answer all these questions to provide clarity.

The second way writing creates clarity is through the practice of planning. Winston Churchill once said, "Plans never work, but planning is invaluable." The real benefit of writing down your commitment to a Thirty Day Trial doesn't come from the piece of paper you have at the end. I often don't look at the paper again until the trial period is over. The real benefit comes from how writing down your commitment and plan prepare you for the obstacles ahead.

Writing Makes Your Commitment Memorable

The second function of writing down your commitment is rather simple. You'll actually remember to stick with it if you write it down. This may sound a bit unusual – how could you forget to follow your trial?

Well, contrary to a lot of popular opinion, most the times myself and others I've observed fail to make it through the first thirty days it is simply because they forgot to continue with it. You may get really busy one day and completely forget to go to the gym. Although this is less common when removing a bad habit like smoking, forgetfulness is still the biggest culprit that will sabotage your success.

Writing down your commitment, even if you never look at it again, solidifies it in your mind. This way you are far less likely to forget.

Writing Motivates

The third reason for writing your commitments is that it creates a burst of motivation. If you've had trouble starting a change, writing down your desires and plans can usually create a burst of momentum that will carry you forward for the next day or two. This first boost of motivation isn't permanent, but it can be enough to get started if you are moving slow.

All of my Thirty Day Trials are written on a separate piece of paper I store in a binder. I write the commitment to look like a miniature contract with myself. This means I write down my habit in specific rules which I plan to uphold for thirty days and then I sign it. You don't have to follow the same approach, but this small ritual helps give me the push to get started immediately.

What a Written Commitment Looks Like

All of my commitments have a few major components. Again, the act of writing is more important than form, so don't get caught up in the details. But, if you are looking for tips to get started, here is some of the aspects I use:

1. The nature of my trial stated as an affirmation.
2. The period for which the trial will last (i.e. May 12-June12)
3. A list of any (usually no more than 3) rules which must be adhered to for the trial to be successful.
4. A list of suggestions for making the habit run smoothly. Here you can also write in what Advanced Methods you plan to use that I mention later in the book.

On the next page is a rough template of how my commitments look. I write all my commitments into a binder on a separate piece of looseleaf. I find the act of writing a tangible copy to be better than using bits and bytes in a computer, but it is completely up to you.

30 Day Trial

I, _____ hereby commit to following this habit:

Rules:

1) _____
2) _____
3) _____

May 12 - June 12, 2007

Additional Suggestions and Techniques Used:

-
-
-
-
-

Overview:
The First Thirty Days

If you are new to changing habits and using trial periods, I'd suggest you start here. Advanced techniques will probably only complicate matters when what you really need to do is get started. They can be useful at making tricky changes, but the majority of habits you want to alter can be controlled by the basics. The other tools I'll offer later in this book aren't as important as practicing the first thirty days.

Having done dozens of thirty day trials in the past several years, I've found that most changes undergo the same basic formula. None will provide identical challenges, but there are common themes that allow you to prepare. Starting a trial period is a bit like vacationing to a new place, you can plan sufficiently with maps and guidebooks but there are always surprises that you can't prepare for.

I've found that most Thirty Day Trials go through several phases:

1. The Sprint
2. Drag
3. Smoothing
4. The Bump
5. The Plateau

The Sprint: Days 1 – 3

The first three days are what I like to call "The Sprint." During this period both motivation and difficulty are high. Although you may have a bit of difficulty adapting to your changes, the first three days represent a high point in focus. It is important during this phase to pace yourself and avoid burnout.

It is easy to start an exercise habit by racing ten miles and then not run again for months. Your sprint can easily turn into exhaustion, so it is during this phase

that you need to slow yourself down and ensure you aren't over exerting yourself. This is also true with dieting, budgeting or waking up earlier. Stick with a pace you can last for several months not just a few days.

Drag: Days 4 – 10

The drag is usually your first wall. It is a particularly difficult phase where most habits will fail to stick. This happens once your motivation burns out but the difficulty remains. Motivation is a quick burst of energy, but the difficulty of sticking with your commitment can often last several days.

If you fail at the drag, usually it is because of two reasons. One, you might have burnt yourself out at The Sprint, draining out your motivation well before the finish line. Two, you may have selected a habit change that is too challenging for you to handle immediately. Breaking down your habit change into smaller chunks that you can take over the course of several Thirty Day Trials might be preferable.

Smoothing: Weeks 1 – 3

The next phase, Smoothing, lasts usually between days ten and twenty. This is when you are adapting to your new habit and it is becoming less difficult to perform. You may have still been feeling the Drag at Day 9, but by Day 19 usually it is a lot easier to manage.

Smoothing isn't without it's dangers. When things get easier, they are also easier to forget. It is important to create some system to remind you to stick with your change or you may start slipping during this period when the difficulty level shrinks. Remember that you need to make it at least thirty days without exceptions, so this phase isn't a time to rest.

The Bump: Somewhere between Weeks 1 - 3

The Bump is a phenomenon I notice in about half of my trial periods and it is a huge obstacle to making change work. The Bump is a single event or obstacle that threatens to completely throw your habit off balance. It could be going out to a restaurant with friends to celebrate after starting your diet or it could be forcing to pull a late-night work session when you are planning to get up early.

Why does the bump happen during the Smoothing phase? I suspect it is because this is your most vulnerable phase. During the first week you are usually focused enough on your trial that obstacles are quickly handled. During the last week you are usually firmly rooted enough to survive a big threat. Because you often let your guard down during this period, problems have a way of sneaking up on you.

The section on logistics later in the book should give you some ideas for avoiding the bump.

The Plateau: Beyond Week 3

The Plateau is the final phase of your Thirty Day Trial. Assuming you did everything right, this phase is usually the easiest. It is more of a testing phase rather than a strict necessity. During this point you are really trying to establish that your change will actually hold rather than reinforcing it.

The problem with The Plateau is simply that if you start seeing your habit fall apart here, you are probably going to have to go back to the start. This is the fire in your kiln, and if any cracks start appearing, you will need to go back to the potters wheel.

I certainly don't want to sound discouraging. Sometimes your habit will hold even if it shows a few cracks at this point. But requiring a lot of willpower, at this point, is usually a bad sign. Generally if you've made it to this phase and there are still problems with your habit, you need to look at some more advanced methods to inspect and correct the problem.

Assuming the first three weeks were successful, you should probably still feel like a little bit of work is necessary for your habit, but it feels natural. Even by Day 30 of my trial to wake up at 5:30 each morning to go running I didn't feel jolly, but it did feel normal. That is what you are aiming for: to not require reminders or nagging yourself, it just happens.

Dealing With Logistics

The idea of running a trial might sound great, but it's when you put it into practice that you will see results and potential problems. Managing logistics can be one of the trickiest aspects of putting a habit together. There are many problems that can occur when putting a trial together and running it.

I've found there are three major things you should look for when creating your habit to avoid obstacles later. Those are:

1. Simplicity
2. Flexibility
3. Schedule Breaks

Simplicity

Follow the KISS rule when making habits – "Keep It Simple Stupid!" The parameters of your habit should be built on one or two rules, not twenty. If you want to start exercising more, committing to exercising half an hour every day is enough. You can use some of the advanced techniques later in the book for greater effect, but keep your commitment simple.

I like to break my trials into two sections, commitments and suggestions. Commitments form the core of the habit that must be followed at all times or I have to restart. Suggestions are things I feel would aid my habit creation, but aren't strictly necessary. It is good to have this distinction so you can keep going through more difficult obstacles.

Flexibility

Rigid habits will break. You need to ensure your habit fits as smoothly into your lifestyle as possible. Although I've completely eliminated virtually all animal

products from my diet, I keep a degree of flexibility to ensure my sanity. A bit of egg in a sauce isn't going to give me a heart attack.

Your best bet is to come up with the best guidelines you can for flexibility. Too flexible and your habits will be meaningless. Too rigid and they can't survive in a normal life. Find a balance.

Schedule Breaks

The most common and disastrous obstacle you will face is the dreaded schedule break. This is when your daily routines are immediately and temporarily distorted. A couple things that can cause schedule breaks:

1. Vacations
2. Illness
3. New Projects or Work
4. Major Family Issues

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The best advice I have for managing schedule breaks is to plan ahead. If you see one coming (vacations, projects, etc.) plan to incorporate it into your trial. You want to make a smooth transition, not a collision. If one sneaks up on you, manage as best you can or reset the trial to start again when the schedule break has passed

I can remember a particularly tricky schedule break for myself occurred when I went to a large party in the middle of a trial to run every morning. The party went on all night and I didn't end up getting back home until six in the morning. I had known this might happen weeks in advance, but it didn't occur to me that this sudden change in schedule might influence my habit.

Determined to see the last week of my trial through I proceeded to run five kilometers after having been awake for close to thirty hours. This is the kind of schedule break that I could have anticipated and planned for in advance by creating a provision in my trial for that one day or starting my trial a few days earlier to avoid it altogether.

Not all schedule breaks are easily overcome. During my first attempt at an exercise trial I got terribly sick with the flu. Much to my disappointed, I found I had to restart the trial after I recovered. Your trial “Bump” will most likely be some form of a schedule break. Deal with it as best you can and if it proves too tricky, regroup and start your trial again.

Summary of Thirty Day Trials

- Commit to following one habit for thirty days
- Put the commitment in writing so you can get better clarity, memory and motivation for the next month.
- Make your commitment simple (e.g. exercising for an hour a day) but make your plan more detailed so you will know any potential obstacles beforehand.
- Most trials go through roughly five phases: The Sprint, Drag, Smoothing, Bump and Plateau. In the first phases, motivation and discipline should be your biggest concern to get through. In the last phases it is more important to remember your trial and to ensure sudden changes don't interrupt your progress.

Advanced Methods for Shaping Habits

I've found that half to three-quarters of the habits you would like to install should require no more knowledge than how to go through a Thirty Day Trial and a bit of practice. But the other 25%-50% of the changes you want to make will often require a few tricks. You can use these tricks right away to make your first trial periods go more smoothly, just realize they aren't absolutely necessary. Don't complicate your first attempts and fail to do anything at all.

The goal of any of these methods is to make the initial trial period easier, to make the habit less susceptible to breaking down later or both.

Triggers

The first advanced tool for making habit changes stick is called a trigger. A trigger is simply understanding and reinforcing the cue that starts your habit. Before you can use a trigger to make your habits more resilient, you need to understand how a habit works.

What most people consider a habit, isn't one habit, but many minor habits linked together. These minor habits are small links of thought and behavior that form a larger pattern you generally call a habit. Although smoking may be seen as a habit by some, it is actually many habits linked together. The chain of habits for smoking might be:

1. Feel the impulse for a cigarette
2. Look for cigarette
    a. If no cigarette is found, go to store/borrow from friend

3. Pull cigarette out
4. Light cigarette
5. Smoke

This is heavily simplified, but the point is that habits aren't simple, but complex patterns of behavior.

Where do triggers come in? Well a trigger is nothing more than the first link in the chain of a habit. By controlling the first few links in the chain you can eventually control the entire output. Think about it: if you put most your effort on the first few actions that get you to the gym, wouldn't it seem fairly automatic to work out?

The idea behind triggers is an old one that comes from a certain Russian scientist and his dogs. Ivan Pavlov was researching digestion when he realized that in his process for feeding the dogs, they would begin to salivate before he brought their food. This was because a neutral stimulus, in this case a bell, was rung before feeding.

Soon the dogs associated the bell with food and would salivate only after a bell was rung. Triggers work on the same principle by intensely conditioning the first few minutes of your habit. This focus on the first few minutes creates automatic

associations along the rest of your habit chain. Instead of using a bell and drooling you want to use your own ritual and result with the feelings that will move you to use your habit.

The goal of creating a trigger, is to make a highly consistent ritual based on some initial stimulus that automatically redirects your behavior. The ritual has to be short, simple and highly focused to lead to the new habit you want to install.

A trigger you create for your habit has two components, your cue and your ritual.

The Cue

The cue is a piece of stimulus that precedes your habit, like the bell for Pavlov's dogs. Some habits have a fairly uniform cue, while others may have a couple different initial signals. This may sound a bit complex but the cue for your trigger is actually fairly simple.

Consider you want a habit of waking up early, what would be your cue? This has to be one of the easiest: the sound of your alarm clock. That sound of your

alarm clock is a universal piece of stimulus that gives you the option of waking up. If you wanted a habit trigger for an early riser habit, the alarm clock would be an obvious cue.

What about other habits, like going to the gym? If you're lucky you will have a couple independent cues that are triggered before going to the gym. This could be going at a particular time of day, going after or before work or once you wake up. But what if you don't have a specific external event to trigger going to the gym? In those cases internal feelings form your cue. Your sudden impulse decision of whether to go or not would be the initial stimulus.

The best cues are external (time of day, alarm clock, after tasks, work, etc.) but when there aren't any consistent external cues for when you should perform your habit, you need to look for internal cues. Internal cues are harder to make triggers, but they will work.

The Ritual

The most important part of your trigger is your ritual. This should be a concise set of actions no more than fifteen minutes long, and often it can be as little as a few seconds. Your ritual needs to be strongly associated with your habit, so it should be done every time in the same fashion.

Rituals may sound a little bizarre, but you already use rituals without realizing it. When I think of my process for going to the gym, I know that once I am at the gym I may do various workouts. But the five minutes of preparation before I go, from grabbing my bag to changing at the gym and signing my name on the entry register is almost an identical sequence. And this was all done without consciously intending to create a ritual.

Because rituals develop naturally, consciously using a trigger is the process of ensuring two things: practice and consistency.

Practicing Your Ritual

Practicing your ritual can be done before the trial starts or it can be simply monitored once the trial begins. Practicing before your trial starts means setting aside an hour or two from your schedule to practice the initial few minutes of your habit repeatedly. This will make it easier to follow your trigger once the trial begins.

I've used this before when trying to wake up early. Setting aside thirty minutes, I practiced waking up immediately after my alarm went off. My ritual was only a few seconds involving standing up and walking around. By conditioning this a dozen or more times it allowed me to remember my trigger when I was actually using the habit itself.

Ensuring Consistency in Your Ritual

The most important part of your ritual is that it is consistent. If you don't use

your ritual every time you run your habit it loses power. The benefit of using a ritual is that you use it every time. Having a short ritual before going to the gym isn't useful if you only use it once or twice a week.

Should You Use a Trigger?

If you are new to changing habits, the answer is probably no. Keeping triggers in mind might be useful, but it will make your initial efforts too complicated. Keep it simple and focus on your trial. If you have been struggling with a change and a Thirty Day Trial doesn't seem to be enough, I'd consider using a trigger to help reinforce your habit.

Some habits are better candidates for using triggers. To create effective triggers a habit should be:

- **Narrow** - Your habit should have a fairly simple path of behavior. Sticking to a diet is harder to make a trigger because you never eat in only one situation.

- **Positive** - Your habit should be to do something, not to avoid something. Quitting smoking is a negative habit (negative as in absence, not bad) because you are eliminating something. Going to the gym is a good habit for a trigger but quitting smoking is harder because the first links in the chain can sometimes be unclear. If you want tips for those habits, see Replacement Theory.

I found using a trigger invaluable in helping me establish the habit of waking up early. The cue with this habit was easy – the sound of the alarm clock. Forming a ritual meant putting myself in a darkened room and setting my alarm clock one minute ahead of the current time. I practiced waking up to the alarm clock and jumping out of bed.

This practice doesn't form the habit for you, I still needed time to form the ritual perfectly in actual conditions, but it did give me a head start in forming a usable trigger.

Keep in mind that a trigger will usually make the first few days more difficult (as you are more precise in your conditioning) but it will make the habit reinforced better in the long haul. Triggers are a good strategy if you can make it through the first few days, but have trouble keeping a habit for months.

Replacement Theory

Another advanced method for changing habits is replacement theory. Replacement theory is basically the idea that you can't get rid of a bad habit. Habits can't be eliminated, only replaced with other habits. In order to keep your resources and needs conserved, every time you remove a bad habit it needs to be replaced with something better. If you wanted to quit smoking, replacement theory would suggest that you need to find another habit to switch it with.

Replacement theory isn't completely necessary since the process of creating habits to do, not avoid, something are usually done automatically. If you want to start exercising, isn't usually necessary to come up with a complex approach to replace the habit with something else. Usually you will just move to another habit.

How does replacement theory work? The idea is that for every habit you eliminate, you offer up an alternative habit that you will do instead. So if you decide to eliminate junk food, what will you eat or do instead? You may decide to

remove the chips from your house and replace them with carrots or celery. You could also eliminate your junk food and decide to use reading as an alternative for when you feel the urge to snack.

Replacement theory is useful is in three areas:

1. To make adjustment easier. Creating a specific replacement habit makes the initial thirty days less severe.
2. To reinforce one alternative. Not following replacement theory can often create a weak set of habits that can be easily pushed aside making your change more vulnerable to sliding back.
3. To conserve needs. Eliminating a habit can sometimes distort your internal needs. Replacement theory suggests a way to reduce this problem.

Easier Adjustments

Large negative habits often result in, "Now what?" You've gotten rid of the junk

food, television or any other bad habit and you now don't know what to do instead. Coming up with a specific replacement strategy will help ease the transition phase.

With any negative habit the process of replacement always occurs. When you give up television, the time you once devoted to television must get reallocated to other sources somehow. The problem is that it can take a few days to reallocate these resources which puts strain on your adjustment period.

Using replacement theory means that you are more likely to make it past The Sprint and Drag during the first ten days.

Reinforce an Alternative

The second benefit of replacement theory is it makes your habits less vulnerable to slide backwards later. In a normal conditioning process, you might replace your television watching with habits of reading, work, playing games, socializing or taking up new artistic pursuits.

Although these are good alternatives, you may only be weakly associated to doing any one of those. This means that having only one conditioned alternative,

say reading, means that if you eventually fall back you will probably fall back on your alternative and not on the original habit. So if you have a really stressful day or a particular obstacle makes following your habit difficult, instead of falling back on watching television as your default, you are more likely to fall back on reading.

Conserve Needs

The biggest reason to use replacement theory is to conserve needs. Even if you believe a habit is really destructive or negative, it does usually have some advantages. You may not want to eat unhealthy foods but they do taste great, keep you feeling full and give you something to do.

Replacement theory gets you to pick alternative habits that will conserve the original needs of the first habit. So if junk food gave you the pleasure of eating and feeling full and staved off boredom, your replacement habits should tackle these as well. You might decide to start cooking healthy foods that also taste great. Or giving yourself something fun you can do with your time and not eat.

Replacement Theory in Action

I used replacement theory when trying out several habits involving television. I've experimented with different forms of a television blackout habit from limiting usage, watching shows only on tape, not watching television by myself or completely eliminating it altogether. Each had it's pro's and con's but they all required me to remove something, namely TV. Replacement theory helped me put back the needs and time that was previously being used by television.

First I determined the needs that were being fulfilled by television:

1. Entertainment
2. Rest
3. Social

From that I sought out different strategies to replace these needs. I enjoy painting so I added that to replace the entertainment TV offered. For rest, I found meditation or walks a better substitute. For social interaction I joined Toastmasters to interact with other people.

In addition to the needs I replaced by changing my television usage, I replaced the time spent watching television with other activities. Even if my needs were being fulfilled, I didn't want a schedule vacuum that would just be filled up with other activities that offered little value or joy in my life.

After several different trials and reviews, I've decided that moderate television usage works best for me. I don't usually watch television by myself and I only watch shows I know will have a high value in advance. Testing out various forms of television watching helped me reassess the value it provided in my life. Although you can change any habit if it is important enough to you, if you can't find viable replacements for the needs you are removing from the old habit, you may want to reconsider your approach.

In addition to this, I've used replacement theory when becoming a vegetarian, cutting down on internet usage and various other habits. It can be a useful tool for looking at new changes to see how you can fit them into your lifestyle. It is an even better tool for assessing the value of a habit by measuring the needs that couldn't be replaced through the change.

Consistency

Another advanced tool to use to make habits lock in is to utilize consistency. This one is similar to triggers, but your goal is to make the entire habit more uniform. Instead of exercising at several different locations and different types of exercise, you may make it a habit just to lift weights at a particular gym at a particular time of day.

The more consistent you can make your habit the easier it is to follow. You lose variety and flexibility with more consistency, but it can be used at the start just to form the habit. There are several ways you can use consistency:

1. Time of Day
2. Daily not Weekly
3. Type of Activity

Time of Day

You can ensure greater consistency by performing your habit at the same time every day. This means waking up at the same time every day. Going to the gym at the same time every day. Eating meals at the same time every day. Controlling the time of day, or better the events surrounding the time of day (end of work rather than 5pm) will ensure your habit is more strongly associated.

Daily *Not* Weekly

I never make a Thirty Day Trial from a habit that isn't daily. Exercising once a day is easier than three times a week because it is more consistent. Although this is an advanced technique, I'd suggest following it for your first trials as well. It took me several failed attempts to make exercise an automatic habit before I realized it was easier to make it daily.

Type of Activity

Another way you can use consistency is in the type of activity you do. So eating more of the same foods, working out at the same place, using the same method to get work done would all be ways to increase consistency.

Don't get too caught up in making your habit perfectly consistent. Consistency is a good goal to have in the first few weeks, but afterwards you want flexibility. Once you have established consistency and made certain patterns of behavior default you can start making modifications to make the habit more useful. I wouldn't want to eat the same thing every day or do my workout the same way seven days a week.

Initial Leverage

What if you can't seem to get past the first few steps? This can be a problem with really big habit changes where your own motivation and discipline don't seem to be sufficient to solve the problem. In this case you have two options: break down or use leverage.

Breaking down is the first answer which means that you take a difficult habit and introduce it in a few phases. Let's say your normal wake up time is 8am - noon and you want to make it 5:30. That might be too difficult in one go. So you could have one trial to wake up at 7am consistently and then after that habit is established, move to 6:15am and then eventually 5:30.

Breaking down your habits is a good way to manage difficulty, but it isn't the

only method. Leverage can help you tackle a difficult change you want to do all at once. Leverage basically means putting extra pressure on yourself to perform. Here are some ways you can get leverage:

1. Public commitments.
2. Investment
3. Reward/Punishment

Public Commitments

One strategy to use leverage is to make public commitments to stick to your Thirty Day Trial. This means telling friends, family members or the world what you intend to do. I've found whenever I make a public commitment, I am under far more pressure to succeed than if I am the only person who knows.

Investment

Another strategy I have seen applied to great effect is the use of investments. An investment might mean telling a friend you will pay him one hundred dollars if you fail to stick to the change you want to make. It could also mean writing a donation check to a political organization you don't support and getting a friend to mail it should you slip up.

Money is the easiest to invest, but you could also but your time, energy or other resources on the line.

Reward/Punishment

Leverage can also be found through rewarding or punishing your actions. I prefer the reward method. This could mean that if you follow your trial for the next several days you will give yourself a reward. Making it through three days of your diet could mean getting to watch a favorite television show, going to the movies with friends or buying a new gadget for your computer.

Remember that rewards need to be given after the correct behavior is executed. Setting up backwards rewards, such as watching your favorite television show before going to the gym, can do more harm than good. Place any rewards or punishments after you've had a chance to follow your habit.

The purpose of leverage is to give you a bit of momentum to get over the conditioning phase, not as a complete alternative. By Day 20-Day 30 your habit should be established strongly enough that leverage isn't necessary anymore. If you still need excessive rewards or punishments to get the behavior you want, you probably need to go back and retool your habit.

Operant Conditioning

After Pavlov's experiments with drooling dogs led to the forming of classical conditioning, another set of experiments done by B. F. Skinner involving some rats in a box led to the forming of operant conditioning. Classical conditioning is very simple stimulus/response. This is the type of conditioning you are trying to use when you want to make use of triggers and it forms the basis of habits themselves.

Operant conditioning is about how habits stick more when they are rewarded and fade away when they are punished. If you've tried to change a habit but felt internal resistance almost the entire way through, it probably won't stick. Habits that cause you pain are never going to sit as strongly as habits that create pleasure for you.

This is often what happens with crash diets. You can stick with them for a few weeks. Normally this would be enough to overcome the conditioning phase and they should stick, right? Unfortunately these diets are often restrictive and unhealthy. Because they cause you a lot of pain, they slip away as soon as you stop putting pressure on them.

Operant conditioning may sound complicated, but the goal is simple: you want to develop habits that cause you more pleasure than pain. Keep in mind that I am referring to the short-term. If a habit caused you pain in the short and long-term, there would be no point of creating it. But just because a habit of exercise, following a budget or reading more will benefit you in a few months and years, doesn't mean your neural associations regard the habit as a good choice.

Your aim with using operant conditioning is to ensure that the short-term effects of your habit are more positive than negative. More importantly, the habits you use as replacements must be more pleasurable than the alternatives you are using to replace them. This isn't always entirely possible, but if done successfully it can go a long way in making change last permanently.

There are several major ways I've found to change the balance of pleasure and pain with your new habit and the old one:

Hack the Habit

Alter the habit so that it becomes more fun to use. If your new diet seems restrictive, try experimenting with new foods to make it tastier. If your exercise plan is boring, try martial arts, dance classes or hiking. Change how you execute the new habit to make it more fun and exciting.

Generally you can find more enjoyable ways to do something, it just isn't a priority. Make it a priority because if you don't like your new habit it won't stick.

Hack Your Thoughts

The next method to shift the balance of pain and pleasure is to change your perceptions of the habit. Instead of viewing a negative habit as something that you shouldn't do, make it a must. Don't just estimate the benefits, research them. Immerse yourself in the benefits of a new habit and the downfall of an old habit.

This method works best when you are already into your trial period. Doing a bunch of research before practicing doesn't make the associations strong enough.

Add Secondary Gain

Link your new habit with something else that is enjoyable. Unlike arbitrary rewards you use as leverage, you need to make this linkage something that resonates with your habit. If you want to quit smoking, you might want to link that habit with playing with your kids and seeing the connection knowing you are setting a good example for them.

These advanced techniques: triggers, replacement theory, leverage and operant conditioning are just some of the different methods you can use to make your Thirty Day Trials go more smoothly and make your habits permanent. Check out the resources section at the end of the book for information about where you can learn more about changing habits.

Changing Habits of Thought

What if your habit change isn't a behavior, but a pattern of thinking? What if the change you want to make is improving your self-confidence, getting out of depression or simply thinking more optimistically about the world? These patterns of thought are habits, but they can be especially difficult to change through normal means.

Changing thought habits through Thirty Day Trials is difficult because it is much harder to control your thinking directly. Forcing yourself to go to the gym may take a bit of willpower, but forcing yourself to think positive when you are depressed can be almost impossible.

If I asked to not think about polar bears, you would probably have some difficulty. How do you not think about something without thinking about it? It is this problem that plagues most attempts to change thought patterns. Directly

altering patterns of thought usually fails because by the time you realize you've broken your habit it is already in pieces. There is no safety net to catch you before you fall.

Instead, I prefer an indirect method for changing habits of thought. There are three major ways you can tackle stubborn thought patterns. None of these are easy or instant cures, but they can indirectly tackle a problem that can't usually be taken down through trials and willpower.

Method One: Affirmation

Even if you can't commit to being optimistic 24/7 or feeling confident all the time, you can commit to forcing a bit of optimism a few times each day. Affirmations basically mean you commit to reciting statements that reflect your new positive mental habits a few times each day.

Understand that affirmations are only reminders, they aren't a complete solution to changing your habits of thought.

Method Two: Environment

Instead of making a trial to change your thoughts, change the environment that triggers those thoughts. This means remove the influences that are counteracting the changes you want and focus on those influences that reinforce them. Here are just a few ways you can break habits of thought through environmental changes:

1. Join a new organization that has the attitude you want
2. Dump negative people from your life
3. Listen/Read inspirational material
4. Place reminders of your goals/affirmations around you
5. Get mentors and friends who inspire you.

Method Three: Action

The third and most effective method for changing patterns of thought is simply

to do the actions that create those thought patterns. Affirmations and environmental changes can be a good start, but action is the only real cure. This means if you want more self-esteem, do the things that make you feel more worthy. If you want more confidence, build some competence. If you want more happiness, do the things that make you feel happy.

Combining behavioral changes with affirmation and environment is the most effective method I know to make permanent changes in thought patterns.

Behavior Before Thoughts

I'm a firm believer in the philosophy that says change your behavior to change your thoughts. Changing thought habits is tricky and an attempt to boost your confidence, self-esteem or happiness directly can often backfire leaving you with the opposite approach. Instead I like to tackle behaviors head on. This often ripples back into habits of thought.

So if you want to change your mental health, work on setting goals, changing your behavioral habits and following through. This will give you more confidence and pride than affirmations or motivational tapes ever could.

Habitual Mastery

Now that you've started using habit changes, what can you do with them? Changing habits isn't just a process for making drastic life changes after an immense amount of pain. Habit changes are simply a new option for experimental living. You can try out different patterns of thought or behavior to see how they fit into your life.

Here are just a couple of the ways I use habit changes:

1. Reach goals/achievement
2. Save time
3. Have more fun/excitement
4. Experiment
5. Challenge myself

Achieving Goals Through Habits

These techniques are good if you want to make a single identifiable change, like starting a new diet, budget or quitting smoking. But what if you want to use habits as part of a larger process for achieving goals?

Whenever I set out a new goal, my first question is what habits I'll need to achieve it. If you want to earn a certain income, run a marathon or develop better relationships, you'll need to break down those larger goals into the habits that form the foundation.

Sometimes the habits you will need are obvious. If you don't exercise and want to lose weight, you already know a good place to start. But where the power of changing habits really comes into play is when the change in behavior isn't

obvious. By going through a simple process you can identify what habit would best aid your goal.

I use a simple four step process to take a large goal and figure out what habit to work on next. Those steps are:

1. Elicit Your Goals
2. Determine Major Actions
3. Define a Habit
4. Implement a Thirty Day Trial

Elicit Your Goals

The first step to taking a large goal and putting it into a single habit is to figure out what your target is. Recently I used this process with myself. I've always been a slender guy, and although regular exercise and a vegetarian diet were keeping me fit, I wanted to put on about ten more pounds of lean muscle mass over a few months.

My first step was to define my goal. I decided that over a three month period I wanted to put on an additional ten pounds of muscle. I write down all my goals in the same binder I use for my Thirty Day Trials, so the process of committing to a goal in writing is similar to committing to a habit.

Determine Major Actions

A goal is usually a destination. The next step is to figure out what the major actions, or overall direction your behavior will need to take to get you there. With my goal, I did an evaluation of my diet for several days and calculated all the grams of protein, carbohydrates and calories.

Comparing these values to various sources I realized that a good experiment to help reach my goal was to see if eating more protein, carbs and calories would get me the results I wanted. My major action was simply to eat more and eat healthier. If you want to be rich, major actions could be reducing spending, increasing income or investing more. Major actions are a general path to success.

Define a Habit

The next step is to take the general path and make a concrete map. From your major action you want to come up with one specific change that will work towards your goal. Remember not to make it too complicated and broad, or it will likely fail. Keep things simple and target one specific behavior.

For me, choosing the behavior was tough. I needed flexibility in my diet to match up with a busy schedule and I didn't want to eliminate everything tasty from my diet to only see modest results. Defining a habit is often the hardest step because you need to weigh in factors of flexibility, impact and simplicity.

If your habit change is entirely rigid, then it will snap at the first problem you face. I felt that deciding in advance exactly what I should eat and giving set meal times was too rigid to fit in with my lifestyle. If the habit change lacks impact, it won't do anything. I could eliminate one piece of junk food or incorporate one new food item, but that would be slow and would probably have little long-term impact. If the habit lacks simplicity, it will be too hard to adhere too. Having a complex system of calorie and protein counting might work for elite athletes but I needed something that didn't require a lot of thought.

After careful review, I defined my new habit to help achieve my goal was to eat five smaller meals a day. This would give me the nutrients spaced out in an even format, reduce snacking on unhealthy foods and ensure I was getting enough food. I decided that to qualify each meal required 20g of protein and 40g of carbs (not difficult with most foods)

Implement a Thirty Day Trial

With this new change in hand, I set out a trial to follow my meal schedule along with the food restrictions for the next thirty days. Having done dozens of trials I know what to expect, including potential logistical problems that could come up. Starting your trial is the first step in making it a habit and moving you closer towards your goal.

You can apply this process whether your goal is financial, health, mental, social or professional. Certain goals are more dependent on habits than others, so you shouldn't always use the lens of habits to achieve your goals, but I've found it a useful approach for reaching many different objectives.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Once you start getting good at making habit changes, there are a couple questions you should ask yourself to take your progress further. These questions also apply if you are just starting or already a master. When asking these questions it is important to think for yourself and not give knee-jerk responses.

Q: Am I Making This Change Because it Works or Because I Think it Should?

Although I have eliminated many of my bad habits and formed many productive ones, I don't like to preach. This is simply a tool, what you build with habit changes is up to you, I don't want to push you to a specific ideal or model of excellence. If you discover that habits of binge drinking, chain-smoking, promiscuous sex and sleeping until noon are ideal for you, I'd say go for it.

Habitual mastery is about having the ability to see and decide for yourself. Many of the habits I successfully installed, I later removed. I went for several months without television, before modifying the habit again to moderate usage. Some might suppose that any television is negative. Others might say that not watching television is too much of a sacrifice. My advantage is that I get to see both sides without a lot of struggle. I don't speculate, I test.

I began changing habits with a firm mind about what habits were good and which were bad. Today I have enough experience that I can see both sides and know that good and bad are simply relative to your goals, ambitions and ethics. All the skills in this book can give you is the ability to choose. I feel that ability is precious enough that you should decide for yourself.

Q: How Firm Should I Hold Onto the Habit?

Is your habit a temporary experiment or should it be a permanent lifestyle change? The question of stability can be a difficult one to answer before going into a change. My approach has always been to treat the first thirty days as an experiment, nothing more. Once those thirty days are over, you can then make a

decision about whether you want to continue or stop.

For some decisions, however, this might not create the force of will strong enough to hold onto the change. If you treat your recovery from an addiction as an experiment, this might not have the emotional conviction to get over your withdrawal.

For habits that you have a high certainty you will want to continue, my suggestion is to set a Thirty Day Trial and a Ninety Day Review. This means that after ninety days you do a review of the progress of your habit and decide whether or not you wish to continue. Usually ninety days has put enough distance between yourself and old patterns to make an effective decision. I used Ninety Day Reviews when switch to a vegetarian diet and a few other changes. Although I was using very little focus to continue the habit at that point, ninety days did form a good buffer zone to push me to continue.

For experimental habits where you aren't sure whether you'll keep them, I'd suggest just leaving the thirty days and making up your mind later. Unless the change is truly horrible, it is usually a good idea to wait the entire thirty days. Not only does this boost your willpower for future trials but it gives you a chance to fully review the experiment.

Q: How Should I Run an Experiment?

Running experiments is one of the most important ways you can use habit changes. A year or two into making habit changes I realized that all the major habits I had wanted to change at the outset were already adjusted. This left me asking, what next? The answer was to experiment and try changes that I would never have considered before learning this skill.

1) Measure Anything Useful

Take the time to measure during your trial. For an experiment to be effective, you should have some results to see whether it has been effective or not. If you want to start a new dietary experiment, you might want to make daily measurements of your weight, physical abilities or subjective energy levels.

For a really good experiment, track the results for about a week before starting the trial and compare that data to the thirty days in your trial. This works great if your trial is for an area where you can simply look back to see changes or improvements.

2) Keep a Journal

Keeping a written record of your thoughts and experiences during the trial can be useful to see the effects. Sometimes your memory will blur over the details of the past month, but looking though your journal can give you brief snapshots of your feelings throughout the trial.

Journaling also helps keep you committed by giving you an outlet to solve problems, so I recommend it even if you aren't running an experiment.

3) Try to Reduce Bias

Eliminating subjective bias is impossible, but you want to keep yourself impartial to the results. When I run an experiment I entertain the possibilities that it worked as well as possibilities that it failed completely and then look for supporting evidence of both theories. Subjectivity won't exactly make your experiment scientific, but if it was impossible to reduce personal bias at all our judicial system wouldn't be based on it.

The First Steps

Where should you start? That question is really up to you. You can use these tools to make a few adjustments in your routine, overcome barriers, reach your goals or even develop mastery for its own sake. I suspect that you probably have had some experience changing habits before and you either wish to improve, your past lack of success led you to this book.

If that is the case here would be the suggestions I would offer for getting started:

1) Pick One Habit Change Within Your Abilities

Tackle just one change at a time and start with something that is both important to you but achievable. Starting with something drastic like completely changing your diet, giving up all your vices or transforming your personality are

unrealistic. As I mentioned earlier, what you choose to modify is up to you, but here are some suggestions for good starter points.

1. Read for 15 minutes a day.
2. Eliminate one form of junk food (e.g. potato chips or cola)
3. Get up 30 minutes earlier, or simply establish a consistent wake-up time.
4. Exercise for 30 minutes a day
5. Spend fifteen minutes each day phoning, mailing or meeting old friends or contacts.

Trying to exercise two hours every day when you normally exercise once or twice a month is probably too drastic. Starting small and choosing one habit at a time will get you comfortable with the process and give you a chance to experiment with the advanced techniques.

2) Focus on the Thirty Day Trial

I once heard from a professional basketball coach that he tells his new athletes to

show him a lay up. He then asks them to practice that repeatedly, because it will be the shot they most often take. Starting with the basics, the advanced tricks aren't as important.

Since I started writing about habit changes, I've had people ask me questions about how to use an advanced technique with the change they want to make. But until you master the basics of the Thirty Day Trial, the rest isn't very important. I could have made this a three page book telling you to stick with your habit for thirty days and that would account for at least 50% of the results.

I've seen estimates that it can take six months of practice to speak a foreign language correctly 95% of the time but twenty years to speak it correctly 98% of the time. Learn the basics and aim for 95% before you try to master another 3%.

3) Strategy is More Important Than Discipline

Discipline is rarely the limiting factor in creating a change. Although a bit of push is necessary to get over gaps, you should put most your energy in designing ways that you won't require as much discipline to execute the habit.

This has really been what the entire book was about. Forming the correct strategy of a Thirty Day Trial followed by some advanced tricks can replace a lot of the need for discipline. By practicing these techniques, you can focus your discipline and use what you already have. Skill is worth more than force.

About the Author

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Links and Resources

Habitual Mastery- The original, popular online series I wrote devoted to changing habits.
(http://www.scotthyoung.com/blog/2006/05/09/introduction-habitual-mastery-series/)

Steve Pavlina- Popular personal development website, originated the thirty day trial as a standard for changing habits.
(http://www.stevepavlina.com/blog/2005/04/30-days-to-success/)

Tony Robbins - Personal development speaker and coach to world leaders, Anthony has many programs on how to change habits and behaviors.
(http://www.tonyrobbins.com)

Zen Habits - Personal development blog and website from Leo Babauta about using habits as a means for achieving personal goals.
(http://www.zenhabits.net)

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